

What exactly are postbiotics?

Postbiotics is a relatively new term that is increasingly being used in marketing. The name comes from the ISAPP* and describes non-inactivated organisms, their fragments, or their metabolic products. It is important to know this: ISAPP is a non-profit organization that is financed by industry funds. The independent, official body – the EFSA (European Food Safety Authority) has not yet authorized the definition of a postbiotic. It only makes a scientifically correct distinction between prebiotics (inactive) and probiotics (active).



Why does EFSA not authorize postbiotics?

Because the definition is too “vague”. The name “postbiotic” means “after life”. A postbiotic can be an inactivated microbial cell and/or its metabolites (metabolic products) and/or its cell components and must have a proven healthy benefit through the various cell components and/or metabolites.

The choice of the suffix “and/or” means that the scope of what a postbiotic can be is very broad. If you apply the definition, the confusion becomes clear. A probiotic that has been killed and thus inactivated is then also a postbiotic. Brewers’ yeast that was active in the brewery and was later killed off by drying is therefore not only a prebiotic, but now also a postbiotic.

There is no clear distinction

It is unclear what exactly a postbiotic should be. Which components of the postbiotic have the positive health effects? How do I measure the effect of a postbiotic if I don’t know which component is responsible? There is a lack of studies to clearly define the term postbiotic and the distinction from pro- and prebiotics. There are still many unanswered questions.

Nevertheless, there are currently many companies advertising the term “postbiotic” on the market. For example, they advertise a product containing yeasts that are cultivated on a culture medium (such as grain stillage and molasses). The culture medium and yeast are then dried together, i.e. inactivated. The term “double-fermented yeast” or “cultured yeast” is used, which, if you take a closer look, actually consist mainly of grain.

The products are often rich in starch, genetic modified and low in yeast content (< 10%). This makes the product quite expensive to use compared to real brewers’ yeast (100%). While these products are clearly labelled as “yeast culture” in the USA according to AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials), unfortunately in the EU they are often incorrectly labelled as yeast only, without referring to the grain content.

According to some companies, postbiotics are said to have a more reliable effect than pro- and prebiotics. It is advertised that metabolic products such as short-chain fatty acids (so-called metabolites) are already contained in the postbiotic, meaning that the body does not have to produce them itself first.

The PROBLEM: Which metabolites are actually contained in the product and in what quantity? There is nothing on the declaration. The shelf life of the so-called metabolites has also not yet been proven. Are they actually measurable in the product in significant quantities? Do they remain stable during storage? Do they survive the stomach/small intestine and do they reach the large intestine intact? What effect do they demonstrably have in the large intestine?

Confused? ... We are, too ...!

You want to know more about production, differences, effects, and practical use?

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* ISAPP: The International Scientific Association for Probiotics and Prebiotics – ISAPP (“eye-sapp” for short) – is a non-profit organization managed by a scientific board and supported by an industry advisory committee.



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